

# Some Western Problems

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## ADDRESS

delivered by

**Hon. Herbert Greenfield, M.L.A.**

Premier of the Province of Alberta

before the

**Canadian Club of Ottawa**

at Ottawa, December 6th, 1924

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OTTAWA

The Dadson-Merrill Press Limited

402 000404179



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Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency, Mr. Premier, and Gentlemen :

As your Chairman has indicated, some thirty-two years ago a green Englishman, as green as his name, jumped his job in a London office, came out to Canada, worked as a hired man in the Province of Ontario at a wage of from \$7 to \$10 a month to get his experience, started out on his own hook upon a rented farm, with a capital the amount of which, if I told you, you would not believe; married, as young men do, to a Canadian girl; worked that farm for a year or two till he got tired of getting a living for the owner of the farm as well as his own family; so jumped that and went to Alberta, north-west of Edmonton, and filed on a homestead sixty miles back; gradually increased his holding and slowly but surely—and it is the steady progress that counts—converted 640 acres of beautiful wilderness, lightly timbered, and without a building or a fence, or a road leading to it, into a farm and a home. (Applause.)

I am not telling you that because it is a story of one man. I am telling it to you because it is the story of thousands of westerners. It is the story of my friend Charles Stewart and many of us. And I do so to establish in your minds that I have at least a modest claim to a reasonable knowledge of farming and the conditions confronting agriculture in Western Canada.

The problems of Western Canada, gentlemen, are the problems of all Canada, and the problems of Eastern Canada are just as much the problems of the West as they are the problems of the East (hear, hear, and applause); and until Canadians, thinking Canadians, grasp these fundamental facts, that East and West are interdependent, are part and parcel of the same Dominion, that we are all Canadians and that the one cannot prosper without the other—until we grasp these facts Canadian development on a broad scale is bound to be retarded.

There is a feeling in the West that eastern people do not appreciate western problems, that they do not make a serious enough attempt to assist in their solution. There is some ground for that feeling. I have

been amazed at the lack of knowledge which I have found among eastern financial men, eastern business men, and even eastern public men, of the problems of Western Canada and the psychology of some of the very trying situations which Western Canada has been called upon to meet.

I believe it is true that Western Canada knows the East better than the East knows the West. To some extent that is the result of circumstances. Many eastern people have moved west, and they have carried with them knowledge and experience gained in Eastern Canada. Not many western people move east, and still fewer stay when they get there. (Laughter.) Again, western members of Parliament spend almost half the year in Eastern Canada, in direct touch with eastern affairs, mixing all the time with eastern people; and, gentlemen, it is the direct contact that counts.

Eastern members of Parliament lack direct touch with western conditions that is so desirable. Everything that can be done should be done to foster a direct contact between the thinking men of the two ends of Canada, which are divided by the wilderness north of Lake Superior. (Applause.) In discussing this matter with my friend the Prime Minister of Canada the other day I suggested to him that I thought it would be a good thing for Canada if there were a statutory provision that at the election of every new Parliament every member of the House should be under obligation, at the expense of the country, to tour those parts of Canada with which he was not at all familiar, and get that direct contact. There is no educator like the eye. In addition to this, eastern business men—in my judgment their business demands it—should maintain at all times that close contact. If we could get that, if we could get to the point where the whole of Canada could get a grasp of the problems of all Canada, our problems, our difficulties, our lack of understanding, would roll away like the mist.

There are some eastern people, and, I am sorry to say, a portion of the eastern press, that are very critical of western people, and more critical still of western thought. We in the West are reasonable people, just as reasonable as any in Canada, just as anxious to build up Canada as any people in any other part of the country (applause) and we have done our part in the building of a Canadian nation. Make no mistake about that. The history of the West shows that its difficulties, brought about to some extent by natural conditions of which we had no control, were accentuated by policies of the past. I do not

criticize those policies. They were largely the result of lack of knowledge and experience in the development of a vast area of new country. In any such gigantic enterprise mistakes are inevitable, and we are not going to cry about the past. We live in the present and we look to the future. (Applause.) The history of the West has been one of continuous, consistent progress. I will not weary you, but I am going to illustrate it to you by just a few figures on agricultural development in the province of Alberta. I was hoping that I should have had the time to draw my figures from that excellent publication, just brought out by Mr. Sanford Evans, of Winnipeg, "The Pillars of Western Canada." There you have the story of the growth of the West in succinct form, and it should be published from the eastern ocean to the western, that people may grasp the marvellous progress that has been made in the great area west of the Great Lakes. I am giving you Alberta figures only, but this is the story of the other two provinces just as much.

In 1906, when we became a province, we had 234,000 acres of wheat; in 1923 the area had become 6,000,000 acres. In 1906 we raised 24,000,000 bushels of oats; in 1923 it was 114,000,000. The total acreage of all crops in 1906 was 906,000; in 1923 it was 11,331,000. The long-term yield is the test of an agricultural country. Our wheat yield over a 25-year period has averaged  $19\frac{1}{2}$  bushels to the acre. Over a 12-year period, the last twelve years, it has been  $20\frac{1}{2}$  bushels. In dairy products in 1910 we were \$7,800,000; in 1923 we were \$22,975,000. So, you see, all the western farmers are not mining wheat. (Laughter.) In creamery butter in 1906 we had less than a million pounds; in 1923 we had 18 million pounds, and it is going up by leaps and bounds. That does not look as though we were a wheat-mining country entirely, does it? But remember this, men, that when a man goes into a country without capital, without money, and he has a family to keep, he has to turn his hand to the thing that will give him the quickest return, and that is wheat. That explains a whole lot. These facts should give you some vision of the future possibilities of Western Canada; and the story of Alberta is the story of Saskatchewan, and it is the story of Manitoba.

The subject upon which I rather hastily selected to speak to you to-day was "Some Western Problems". We have, in my judgment, three outstanding problems which call for solution and which, if we are going to progress, must be solved.

First, the freight rate question.

Second, a rural credit system that will meet the needs of agriculture; for you cannot finance agriculture on a three-months note and a five-year mortgage. It cannot be done, men, if we are to attain that progress which Western Canada indicates that we should attain. It simply cannot be done, and the history of the West proves it. But I have no time to-day to deal with that. That is a question which calls for a half-hour at least, to deal with adequately.

The next is colonization, and I am going to deal with that rather more fully than the others to-day.

But before doing it I want to give you just one concrete illustration of what freight rates mean to the Province of Alberta. Our 1921 crop that was marketed, not including live stock—our grain crop that was marketed was worth \$82,795,000, nearly \$83,000,000. That very same crop, if it had been grown and marketed in the Province of Quebec, adjacent to your Atlantic ports, close to your ocean outlet, would have been worth—what do you think—\$171,506,000 (these figures are taken from official statistics of Alberta and Quebec); a difference of over 100 per cent, which is made up of marketing costs, handling charges and freight rates. And last year we shipped out of Western Canada 378,000 cars of wheat.

There is the geographical handicap which we in Alberta have to overcome. Is it not natural, perfectly natural, that we are alert for every opportunity, that we bend every effort, legitimately to improve that position? It is clear on the face of it that it is the most vital thing affecting the Province of Alberta's development. To offset it we have—what? We have low priced land, much of it of a very high fertility; we have high average yields; and we have an unbounded faith that the future development of the country will iron out many of our difficulties. (Applause.) In ironing them out we ask, and we must have, the sympathetic consideration, the genuine co-operation, of the whole of Canada. (Hear, hear.)

There is only one thing that will materially reduce freight rates; that is increased tonnage. Increased tonnage means development, and development in Western Canada, development in all Canada, means—what? Colonization. In discussing colonization I will necessarily do so to a great extent from the Alberta standpoint, because that is the standpoint I have got a grasp of, but the question applies to the whole of Canada in varying degree.

There has been a period of reaction from the boom years in the West—and it will be many years yet before we recover from the effects of that boom and from the reaction following the war period, a period during which the wisdom of an aggressive immigration policy was questioned by a great many people. We have been through some difficult times in Canada. We have been through some exceedingly difficult times in Western Canada, but, I think, not worse than they have been in many other countries and not so bad as in some other countries. The agricultural situation to-day in Canada, when you come to analyze it carefully, compares very favourably with agricultural conditions in other countries. Those times, I believe, are passing in Alberta, and I hope they are passing in the whole country. The morale of the people has improved. There is a better spirit west to-day than there was two years ago. (Applause.) Business generally gives some indication of improvement, but that, again, will be a very gradual improvement. I believe that we are just round the corner and on the up grade, and that the next decade or two are Canada's opportunity to increase her population and colonize some of her better lands which are awaiting occupation. The question is, will Canada grasp the opportunity? As a result of the years of depression, land to-day in the West is low in price, live stock is low in price, equipment is lower than it has been. Not for years have conditions been more favourable than they are to-day for newcomers to get started on the land with a reasonable capital investment. Now, if my judgment of the situation is correct, and if conditions are going to gradually improve—and I hope to God we shall never see another boom, for the boom was the worst thing, the most damnable thing, that ever struck Western Canada—if my judgment is correct, I say, values will improve gradually, the newcomer will get the benefit of those increased values, and before the next cycle of depression comes round he will be pretty well established on his farm and should be able to stand up against it fairly well.

The need of Canada to-day is more people, not to open up new unsettled areas. We have opened up far too many already. We have spread too thin a population over too large an area. We have created a railway debt, we have created an educational debt and highway debt, altogether out of proportion to our population. (Applause.) We need people to-day to thicken up our existing settlements where there are railways, where there are schools, and where there are roads, and so increase our revenues from taxation without increasing our capital expenditure for the ordinary facilities of civilisation. Free homestead lands are almost gone. To continue settlement on the free homestead

plan simply means continuing to spread your population thinly over a large area and to increase your railway construction and your railway debt. It adds to your difficulties, it does not solve them. The alternative, then, is to thicken up existing settlement, and that necessarily involves financing the purchase of land in areas where facilities now exist.

Quite a problem! Quite a problem! It is a problem, but is it not the problem that we have to solve in Canada before we can solve our railway problem—before we can reduce our national debt—and before we can reduce our taxation? It seems to me that it is. Is it not the only way that you can increase your revenue without increasing your capital expenditure? Its solution calls for the very best that there is in Canada. (Applause.) It calls for the best brains in the financial world, the best among public men, the best among business men, and the best among agricultural men, and it calls for the co-operation of every man who calls himself Canadian. (Applause.) Without faith in ourselves, without faith in our country, we shall not get very far, for it is the biggest domestic problem that Canada has ever been called upon to solve.

“Yes,” you say, “that is very fine, very desirable, but where are you going to get your people?”

The foundation stock of the Canadian people is French and British. It is eminently desirable that that foundation stock be maintained. (Applause.) France has no surplus population. Great Britain has a surplus population and is anxious to settle them in the Dominions overseas, and is prepared to assist in doing so. Then let us begin in Britain and as we gain experience extend to other countries. Americans make splendid settlers; also many of the European peoples.

Experience has shown that a large proportion of single men for colonization purposes are floaters; they are not permanent. We lose too many of them. Experience has also shown that the type of man who gets his roots set in the soil is the man with a family, who has the ambition, the normal ambition, to build up for himself a home, and next in importance to families I would place boys and girls 15 to 18 years of age, the age at which you can readily mould them into Canadians.

And when I say I would go to Britain I would also extend the very same opportunity to people within the bounds of our own Canada, in our own cities, who are not far removed from the land—only a generation or so—and who, like the people in the Old Country, want just a sound,



attractive proposition put up to them, which will protect them against exploitation, to draw them back again to the thing for which they were naturally bent. (Applause.)

Britain has many such people. My father had an ambition to make a commercial man of me. I tried it until I was twenty-one years of age. If I had stuck at it I would have been a rotten failure. But back of me was generation after generation of farmers. For, to my knowledge, over two hundred years we had been farmers, and I was but one generation removed from the land. I could not resist the draw back to the land. That is true not only of thousands in Britain, but also of thousands in Canada. (Hear, hear.)

We do not want the adventurer type. We do not want the get-rich-quick artist: he will shout his head off with grievances. (Applause.) What we want is the quiet, resolute type that does not talk much, but works. That is a hard crack, Mr. Chairman, to make in Ottawa (laughter), but I can assure you, Sir, it was done without malice aforethought. (Laughter.) That at least, gentlemen, has been my observation of the type of man that has stuck and made good in Western Canada.

And when you talk about sticking, I wish you could come with me down into some of the arid belts of southern Alberta, the south-eastern part of the province, where through mistaken immigration effort people were allowed, without direction and without guidance, to go onto lands which were not fit for agricultural purposes. They have gone in there and sowed and not reaped for five or six years. They have put their all into improvements and houses of a good type, and buildings, and have stuck, until to-day they have got to a point where we as a Government in co-operation with the Federal Government and the Railways, are stepping in and paying the railway fare of the family and the cost of transporting the equipment and the live stock of those people and moving them out to an area where they can get a living. (Applause.) I have never seen such an exemplification of the true courage of the pioneer as I have seen exemplified in southern Alberta. Is it any wonder that men facing such abnormal conditions develop in some places abnormal thinking? The wonder is, gentlemen, that they have kept as steady as they have kept.

Get the idea out of your mind, as the Chairman intimated to you, that it is essential to have agricultural experience to make good on the land in Western Canada, or any part of Canada. I had none. I have five farmers and a farmer's wife in the Alberta Cabinet. They have all

done fairly well on the farms, and none of them had previous experience. Major Strange, who won the wheat championship in Chicago last year, was a green Britisher. The man who won it this year—I think his name is Mitchell—was a cotton spinner from Manchester: he did not have any previous experience in farming. How do you explain it? I explain it by the fact that here and in Britain, as I said before, there are thousands of people whose ancestors for generations lived on the land and loved the land, and you cannot break a tie like that in one generation. (Applause.)

I have said that Canada's aim in colonization should be to thicken up existing settlement, where the necessary facilities already exist, so that revenues, provincial and national, will increase without additional capital expenditure; I have indicated the type of settler experience has shown to be desirable; I have suggested where those settlers can be obtained; and I have further shown that to thicken up existing settlements where there is no longer free land means the financing of the incoming settler. Now we come to the question, "How do you propose to do it? And here, Mr. Chairman, I do not suggest for a moment that what I am going to say is necessarily the solution of the problem. I have discussed it with men from all angles—with ten or a dozen who know something about the situation we have to meet—and with very few variations they have, in a large measure, in fact almost entirely, agreed that the suggestion I am about to make is at least on the right track; and I give it in the hope that it may stimulate the effort to reach the real solution which I think I have shown you to-day must be found before we can go very far ahead in Canada.

First, approach the British Government to have a branch of the Empire Settlement Board located in Canada, under the control of Canadians. The Board should include in its personnel two or three of the very best financial men in Canada, men who will carry complete confidence both here and in Britain, whose standing as business men will insure that investments are sound, that the security given is adequate, and that the prospect of repayment is reasonably safe. You have then established co-operative connection between Great Britain, who has a surplus population that it wants to place in the Dominion overseas, and Canada, who needs that population.

Then approach your Provincial Governments, get them to carefully look over their territory and select definite areas where the soil is good, where the average precipitation is adequate, where railways, schools and roads are, and where development is retarded through lack of population. These areas can be designated anything you like. Call them "areas"—

call them "projects"—call them what you like. The Provincial Government to undertake the selection of these areas, to provide technical and expert agricultural advice on the methods of farming, to advise and assist in purchasing stock and equipment, to protect the newcomer from exploitation, and generally to follow up the welfare of the settler until he is well established.

This machinery is largely in existence now. It would just need supplementing. These areas or projects to be approved by the Provincial Government, by the Canadian Land Settlement Board, and by the Empire Settlement Board, and, when approved, the Land Settlement Board of Canada to have the power to issue land bonds in such amounts and at such times as may be necessary to finance those projects as they are brought under settlement.

Sell those lands to your incoming settler on long terms, on the amortization plan, so that his annual payment will not be too heavy; and be as easy on him as you can in the first two years, until he finds his feet. The security will be the land itself. In some cases improvements are on it. Where they are not it will be necessary in some cases to finance improvements enough to give a man a start. But with carefully selected settlement in carefully selected areas, with the settler carefully supervised and protected from what has happened previously in Western Canada—ruthless exploitation—under those conditions your security should be fairly good.

It may prove necessary, as the thing develops, to provide something in the nature of a Government guarantee for the bonds of the Land Settlement Board. If that does prove necessary, I submit, gentlemen, that it would be good business for Canada to do so. (Applause.)

It would seem that a scheme along the lines suggested, if sound—and I think it is sound—would be big enough to appeal to the biggest men in Canada, and it would take men of experience, men of courage and men of vision. It would be substantial enough to appeal to the prospective settler who has a little money and is a little timid—and I can understand that timidity—who is a little timid about venturing into a new country unless there is some such organization to take hold of him and protect his interest and guide him until he becomes established.

I would say offhand—I have not had the time yet carefully to examine this particular phase of it, but I would say offhand, taking into consideration that a good many people in coming in would have some means, that the average loan under such a scheme would not exceed \$2,500.

There are bound to be some losses. No business can be conducted without them. There are bound to be some misfits. But you have at least done what you never did before; that is, you have tried to protect yourself against loss and against misfits.

The whole proposal involves the substitution of orderly, organized colonization by an organization working in co-operation with the British, the Dominion and Provincial Governments, that is out for service to Canada and not for gain, and that will act as a definite check on the creation of artificial land values to take the place of haphazard immigration without direction and without supervision, without protection of the settler from exploitation, that has previously prevailed.

You may find some apprehension among people and they may raise the question, "Can Canada find a market for largely increased production?" I have discussed that within the last two or three days with men who know something about the grain business of the world and who should be able to speak with greater authority than I can speak on that question. They have no uneasiness about that situation. The world's population is increasing yearly. The Oriental peoples are rapidly turning to wheat as a staple food. A man whose judgment and work qualify him to express a weighty opinion upon this question told me only last night: "Greenfield, in ten years the United States of America will be buying a large proportion of wheat for their own consumption from the Dominion of Canada." I do not think he is far out. These views, I say, have been confirmed by men who are in a position to speak authoritatively upon them. At any rate I am satisfied that we have brains enough in Canada to meet any situation of this kind that may develop as the result of increased population.

Now, I have tried to give you some material for thought to-day. I have given it you as a Canadian who loves Canada, who above all things loves the West, and I am going to close with just a line or two from Robert Stead, a Canadian author who has just caught the *spirit* of the West, as Drummond and the author of that wonderful little volume, "Maria Chapdelaine," have caught the spirit of French Canada.

"If the land that was bought with a purchase—

And the purchase has well been paid—

If the hope of my children's children

And the mainstay of my trade

Be mine, and be mine forever,

I must quibble not at the cost,

Lest the chance of my future greatness

Through my own neglect be lost. (Prolonged applause).